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SUBJECT: Botswana Political Briefs February 2009

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¶1. (U) The following is a compilation of February 2009 political highlights from Botswana. This cable covers:

- University of Botswana Re-Opens
- First Cholera Death Reported in Botswana
- Red Cross Completes Refugee Fund Project
- BDP May Change Party Leadership Rules
- BDP Wants to Improve its Popular Vote Share

University of Botswana Re-Opens

¶2. (U) The University of Botswana re-opened on February 16 after two weeks without classes following student unrest (reftel). After the university was closed February 4, two members of the Student Representative Council (SRC, the UB's student government organization) were expelled on accusations of having incited violence among the student body. However, the expelled students took their case to the Botswana High Court claiming that the university had expelled them improperly by not following procedures.

The High Court Judge agreed with the students and found in their favor, nullifying the expulsion and sending the two student government leaders back to school. However, when the campus re-opened on February 16, the Vice Chancellor announced that all the SRC members (including the two who had previously been expelled and reinstated) were being suspended pending a university disciplinary hearing to review the SRC leaders' role in the disturbances. A date for the disciplinary hearing has not yet been set. Some students have reportedly threatened to go on strike again demanding that the SRC members' suspension be lifted. In another university controversy, the UB's Academic and Senior Support Staff Union (UBASSSU) called on the Vice Chancellor to resign following the closure of the university. The UBASSSU has passed a vote of no confidence on the Vice Chancellor and his senior management, blaming their poor handling of student complaints and unrest for the two-week closure of the university.

First Reported Cholera Death

¶3. (U) The Botswana Press Agency reported February 19 that a Zimbabwean woman died of cholera on February 13 at a local hospital.

This is the first reported cholera death in Botswana during the current regional outbreak, though approximately ten patients have tested positive for the disease and been treated and released.

Red Cross Completes Refugee Fund Project

¶4. (U) The Botswana Red Cross Society (BRCS) has completed the construction of 40 new latrines at the Dukwe Refugee Camp. This project was funded under the State Department's Julia Taft Refugee Fund in 2008. The construction started in August 2008 and finished in February 2009. Thanks to the project, 40 refugee families (248

people) have improved access to sanitation. The construction of these latrines created jobs for 8 brick-layers and 4 brick molders, all of whom were refugees from the camp. Other refugees from Dukwe Camp participated in construction by providing labor, which helped to instill a sense of ownership by the refugees for the project.

BDP May Change Party Leadership Rules

¶5. (U) The President and leader of the ruling Botswana Democratic Party (BDP), Seretse Khama Ian Khama, has announced a proposal which would prevent BDP parliamentary and council candidates from also standing for positions in the Central Committee of BDP. At the BDP Central Committee meeting on February 2, President Ian Khama started to lobby for an abolition of "holding dual roles" (i.e. serving both on the BDP Central Committee and holding elected government office at the same time). If Khama's proposal is approved, BDP members running for parliamentary seats during the 2009 general election would be barred from contesting position in the party's Central Committee. Positions on the BDP Central Committee should fall vacant in July 2009, when the party is scheduled to hold a congress which would include the election of Central Committee members. The Executive Secretary of BDP Dr. Comma Serema says President Khama has recommended the strategy of not holding dual positions to the Party Congress and if approved, only Khama himself will serve in both parliament and the party's Central Committee.

¶6. (SBU) Comment: Ian Khama was recruited from the Botswana Defense Force (BDF) to the ruling party in 1998 by the then President Festus Mogae to try and unify the BDP, a party which has been riddled with factions. There are two main factions in the party, one headed by (current Vice President) Mompati Merafhe and Jacob Nkate (currently

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Minister of Education and Skills Development) and the other faction led by Daniel Kwelagobe (currently Public Service Minister) and Ponatshego Kedikilwe (Minerals, Energy and Water Resources Minister). When Khama became President, he attempted to balance the two factions by making Merafhe his Vice President and Kwelagobe both a Minister and the Chairman of BDP. Despite this attempt to keep both factions in check, President Khama is said to be worried by the intensifying animosity between them. With the general election only months away, there seems to be more acrimony between BDP members of different factions than between the BDP and the opposition parties. For example, under current rules, Kwelagobe and Merafhe are expected to take each other head-on for the position of National Chairman of the BDP during the July party congress.

¶7. (SBU) Comment Continued: In the BDP, 80% of current Central Committee members are either parliamentarians or councilors. If the party congress adopts Khama's idea abolishing "dual roles", the BDP will no longer have Central Committee members who are parliamentarians or councilors after its July congress. Then, it is hoped, the factions in the party will be weakened.

BDP Wants to Improve its Popular Vote Share

¶8. (U) In an effort to bolster the BDP's popular vote percentage in the 2009 general election, the party has appointed President Khama as its "Chief Campaigner". BDP Executive Secretary Dr. Comma Serema said that the party is worried by the growing number of constituencies that have become "marginal" for the BDP (i.e. constituencies with increased opposition support). Serema told Poloffs that the party's internal goal is to increase the BDP's share of the popular vote in 2009, after it has declined over the past few election cycles. During the 2004 general elections, the BDP won only 52% of Botswana's popular vote. However, thanks to Botswana's single-member district, first-past the post system, the BDP won 44 of Botswana's 57 elected Parliamentary seats, a strong majority in the legislature.

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